Family Engagement in Out-of-School Time Needs Inventory

This needs inventory[i] is designed to help out-of-school time (OST) programs improve their efforts to engage families. Engaging families in OST is a critical component of the Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) program not only because it is one of the key federal program requirements, but research shows that when families are engaged, student outcomes like attendance, behavior and achievement improve. With the Texas ACE program, we want to go above and beyond just providing family activities. We want to truly engage our families in our programs and with their children. We also know, based on participant data in TX21st, that family participation is an area greatly in need of improvement. To take on this important task of family engagement, we need to work together statewide to infuse research based strategies and share practices in order to fully engage our families.

What is Family Engagement?

The National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group propose three core principles of family engagement in learning, regardless of setting:

- Family engagement is a *shared responsibility* in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.
- Family engagement is *continuous across a child's life* and entails enduring commitment but changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.
- Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the *multiple settings where children learn*—at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in afterschool and summer programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community. For more on defining family engagement, visit http://hfrp.org/family-involvement.

Family engagement in OST incorporates these three principles into effective strategies aimed at improving engagement in order to support children's learning and development in- and out- of school.

Why is Family Engagement Important for OST Programs?

When OST programs reach out to and engage families everyone stands to benefit—youth, family members, programs, communities, and even schools. Specifically, family engagement can:

(1) Support improved participation on OST programs. Families are critical partners in OST programs' recruitment and retention efforts. They are often a program's best ambassadors, not only in encouraging their children to participate, but in reaching out to other families to help them understand the importance of participation in OST programming.[ii] Further, according to previous evaluations of 21st CCLC-funded programs in Texas (released in 2005 and 2007), students who had at least one adult family member participating with them in center activities participated in more activities than students with no family members participating. The data show that once they do participate, adult family members return to participate again at a very high rate.[iii]

(2) <u>Benefit OST participants themselves</u>. When OST programs are intentional about their family engagement strategies then program participants tend to exhibit better outcomes. For example, a study of 96 school-based afterschool programs supported by The After-School Corporation (TASC) efforts to engage families (including hiring a parent coordinator and communicating regularly with families at pick-up time) were some of the most common features among the 10 programs whose participants had the highest academic performance.[iv] Similarly, a Massachusetts statewide study of quality afterschool programs found that communication with families was one of six quality indicators associated with positive academic and behavioral youth outcomes, notably, on improved relationships with adults. [v] With regard to the evaluations of programs in Texas, the positive finding described above that students engage in more center activities if they have adult family members participating indicates that encouraging family participation in center activities may positively impact students' experiences and by extension lead to improved academic performance among the students in at-risk situations targeted by the 21st CCLC program.

(3) <u>Impact family engagement with learning at school</u>. Family engagement in OST programs can be leveraged to improve family engagement in learning. For example, some research studies have found that family engagement in OST can lead to greater involvement in school events, increased assistance with homework, and more encouragement for reading. [vi]

How to Use this Needs Inventory

This inventory is designed as a self-assessment tool to help programs identify and reflect on their family engagement strategies. For the purposes of this tool the term *family*, rather than parent, acknowledges that many children are being raised not just by mothers and fathers, but also by extended family members including aunts, uncles, and grandparents, as well as non-familial guardians. The term *engagement* is intended to capture the wide range of ways in which families can participate in their children's OST experiences and the six categories of engagement presented in this tool reflect this range. Each category represents a strategy that programs can use to reach out to and engage families. Collectively implementing these six strategies leads to effective family engagement.

For each engagement strategy the tool provides a set of indicators that reflect your program's efforts to engage families within that strategy. The ratings are meant to help you reflect on how well, if at all, you are implementing effective engagement practices using a four-point rating scale.

1. **Emerging** means that you are working to develop activities associated with a specific indicator but you want more help doing so.
2. **Accomplished** means that you are confident that you are doing a good job implementing activities associated with an indicator.
3. **Not Present** means that you would like to achieve this indicator but are not working on it yet.
4. **Not Planned** means that you do not plan to implement activities related to this specific indicator.

It is not expected that a program will be addressing all the indicators listed in this tool but it is important that you consider each indicator and rate each so that technical assistance can be tailored to best meet your needs. The tool ends with two short open-ended questions that enable you to highlight your major strengths and challenges in the area of family engagement.

Needs Inventory

1. Have adequate and welcoming space to engage families.				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. There are signs welcoming families into the program space and/or directing them to where their children are.	○	○	○	○
b. Program has a space where family members know that information/communication is available for them - a "Family Comfort Corner," a lounge, a corkboard, a table, a shoetree, etc.	○	○	○	○
c. Program space for community resources allows for privacy and confidentiality.	○	○	○	○
d. There is a family resource center located at the program.	○	○	○	○

2. Establish policies and procedures to promote family engagement.				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. Program hosts at least one annual open house to attract and inform new families and recognize existing ones.	○	○	○	○
b. Program holds periodic orientations - at different times and dates to allow for more family participation.	○	○	○	○
c. Program has a clear and concise "Family/Parent Handbook" that explains all program policies and procedures that families need to know. Family friendly language is used, not jargon or acronyms, in all written communications to families.	○	○	○	○
d. Scheduling of family activities takes into account family members' work schedules.	○	○	○	○
e. The program makes childcare available for younger siblings at meetings/conferences.	○	○	○	○
f. Program provides refreshments and transportation for meetings/events, etc.	○	○	○	○
g. Program has a program improvement council or Advisory Board where family members can help set the agenda.	○	○	○	○
h. Program utilizes more than one approach to engaging families.	○	○	○	○
i. Program has indicators of family engagement as part of its quality assessment tool.	○	○	○	○

3. Communicate and build trusting relationships.				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. Staff members communicate with family members in a friendly, respectful manner. For example, they: address family members by name; they personalize the interaction by asking them about their feelings.	○	○	○	○
b. At family events staff members personally greet each family member.	○	○	○	○
c. Staff members make an effort to engage with family members at least once a week about their child, including seeking input about their children's needs.	○	○	○	○
d. Program communicates with families consistently and uses multiple communications strategies including: flyers, newsletters, phone calls, e-mails, text-messaging, welcome packets, coffee hours, video recording, and photographs.	○	○	○	○
e. Program ensures that families understand communications; engaging interpreter services for communicating verbally and in writing as needed.	○	○	○	○
f. Program fosters improved child-family communications/relations through child journaling and "Family Appreciation" nights.	○	○	○	○
g. Program offers home visits as a way to build communication and trust and provide information.	○	○	○	○

4. Be intentional about staff hiring and training to promote effective staff-family interactions.				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. During Staff Orientation the program has training on how staff can make an effort to understand and respect cultural differences, to be non-judgmental, and keep an open mind about all families.	○	○	○	○
b. Staff receive training and support in being aware of their own "cultural lenses" and/or biases, and how to be respectful of families and children no matter their backgrounds and cultural identifiers such as ethnicity, education level, race, sexual orientation, employment status, language, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.	○	○	○	○
c. Program effectively uses family member volunteers as program ambassadors for recruitment, to call other families to invite or remind them of upcoming events, etc.	○	○	○	○
d. Program has a designated staff member trained to coordinate family outreach and engagement.	○	○	○	○
e. Program staff reflects the demographics of the families served by the program.	○	○	○	○
f. Discussions of family engagement are a regular part of staff meetings.	○	○	○	○

5. Support families and their basic needs				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. Program has information about community resources available for families. Information may include resources for mental & physical health, nutrition, housing, etc.	○	○	○	○
b. Program staff follows up on needs/concerns expressed by family members.	○	○	○	○
c. Staff nurture family members and focus on them. Interaction with family members include time to talk about themselves instead of only talking about their child meet the needs of the adult and not just the child.	○	○	○	○
d. Program hosts forums and discussion groups on topics relevant to issues identified by the families.	○	○	○	○
e. Staff assists family members to advocate publicly for issues such as education, child-care, health care, and tax breaks that affect the program and their child.	○	○	○	○
f. Program offers Leadership Courses and actively recruits family members for those opportunities.	○	○	○	○
g. Program has plans for ongoing feedback; this could be a suggestion box or a more formal survey to ensure that program offerings meet family needs.	○	○	○	○

6. Connect families to each other, program staff, schools, & community institutions				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
a. Staff facilitates introductions & information sharing among families.	○	○	○	○
b. Program offers informal social events or activities that are fun. Some examples include: Mom's Night/Day Out, Family Craft Night/Day, Parents/Couples Night Out, etc…	○	○	○	○
c. Staff invites families to share family traditions such as they cook family recipes, send in photos, or help plan a special event related to their cultural background.	○	○	○	○
d. Staff asks and/or assists family members to write an article for the newsletter: For example there is an "Ask another Parent" section, or an editorial section where families' members can contribute and voice their ideas/opinions.	○	○	○	○
e. Program helps family members identify and interact with staff informally. For example program uses a photo board, rotating staff "greeter", informal social events, has family member and staff serve together on committees, staff/family member talent night, etc.	○	○	○	○
f. Program offers activities for both family members and staff together: Exercise classes, art workshops, first aid course, etc.	○	○	○	○

6. Connect families to each other, program staff, schools, & community institutions				
	Emerging	Accomplished	Not Present	Not Planned
g. Program provides a bridge between family and school to support learning. For example it may host a Family Literacy Night, Science Night, Health Care Day, Math Night, Make It and Take It Night, family fishing expedition, art walk, etc.	○	○	○	○
h. The program cultivates volunteers and invites the larger community in to support the program. For example, staff invites family members to participate in program activities and/or field trips. Staff invites family members to help them locate resources to support program activities.	○	○	○	○

Please provide short (2-3 sentences) responses to each of the questions below.

1. What are the two family engagement strategies or activities at your program that you think are the most effective ways to engage families?
Strategy or Activity 1:
Strategy or Activity 2:
2. What are the two biggest challenges you face to engaging families?
Challenge 1:
Challenge 2:

Thank you for completing the Family Engagement Needs Inventory.

[i] This needs inventory is based on the *Family Engagement Checklist* developed by Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTNet). The original checklist can be found at: http://www.bostnet.org/matriarch/documents/EFI%20CHECKLIST.pdf

[ii] Lauver , S. & Little, P.M.D. (2005). Recruitment and retention strategies for out-of-school time programs. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2005(105), 71-89.

[iii] A full list of published reports can be found at: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2908&menu_id=949

[iv] Birmingham, J., Prechman, E.M., Russell, C.A., & Mielke, M. (2006). *Shared Features of High-Performing After-School Programs*. New York: The After School Corporation.

[v] Intercultural Center for Research in Education and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2005). *Pathways to success for youth: What counts in after-school: Massachusetts After-School Research Study (MARS) report.* Boston, MA: United Way of Massachusetts Bay.

[vi] See, for example, Harris, E. & Wimer, C. (2004*). Engaging with families in out-of-school time learning*. (Out-of-school Time Evaluation Snapshot No. 4). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project [v] See, for example, Harris, E. & Wimer, C. (2004*). Engaging with families in out-of-school time learning*. (Out-of-school Time Evaluation Snapshot No. 4). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.